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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some possible methodologies and approaches to the teaching of empathic listening, an essential component of human communication and listening competency. It defines empathic listening as "feeling with" another: a cognitive understanding of what the other is communicating plus a sensitivity to their state of emotion. The paper first builds a rationale for teaching empathic listening in a communication curriculum, and then discusses some approaches for teaching it which combine theoretical constructs with skill development. The paper explores some theoretical foundations that should be established for any unit, section, or course devoted to empathic listening. Next, the paper examines some implementation procedures which can be used as general guidelines. Finally, the paper provides a number of suggestions for possible approaches, methods, and exercises, which include using Robert Carkhuff's model, a "communication and feelings" approach, and other approaches and exercises. Thirty-two references and a 16-item selected Carkhuff bibliography are attached. (SR)

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APPROACHES FOR TEACHING EMPATHIC LISTENING

T. Dean Thomlison

This paper explores some possible methodologies and approaches to the teaching of empathic listening. A rationale for teaching empathic listening in a communication curriculum is followed by practical suggestions for methodologies and approaches.

What is Empathic Listening?

Counseling and psychotherapy provide the roots for viewing the affective domain of listening and empathy in general. Empathy has been the focus of extensive psychological studies, theory building, and test development. (Guiora; Campbell, Kagan, and Krathwohl; Greif and Hogan) Reik emphasized listening with the "third ear" in the 1940's. (Coonfield, Grey, and Nida, p. 5) Carl Rogers is generally credited as the "originator of the concept of empathic listening." (Wolff, p. 65) It was his view that an "empathic understanding" was one of the three fundamental characteristics of the helping relationship and of a healthy interpersonal relationship. (Rogers, 1970, p. 192) The focus of Rogerian empathy was perception of the "internal frame of reference" of another person. (Rogers, 1957, pp. 95-103)

The heart of empathic listening is "feeling with" another person. It includes a cognitive understanding of what the other is communicating plus a sensitivity to their emotional state. It must include recognition and acknowledgement of our communication partner's feelings--recognition alone is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of empathic listening.

Of course, empathy is facilitated when the communicators have shared similar experiences and feelings. (Wolvin & Coakley, p. 256) Empathic listening, however, is still possible even if a person does not have a parallel or shared experience. This is because empathy functions at a cognitive as well as emotional level. So even if individuals have not experienced a similar event, it is possible to cognitively interpret the verbal and nonverbal cues of the speaker by relating these data to their own world of emotions and experiences.

Can Empathic Listening be Improved?

Numerous studies have demonstrated that empathic listening can be improved. For example, a study involving the teaching of active listening to registered nurses found as little as six hours of training resulted in significant increases in skill levels. Active listening was defined as "the skill of understanding what your patient is saying and feeling and communicating to your patient in your own words what you think he is saying and feeling." (Olson, p. 104) The authors concluded: "This finding suggests that active listening skills can be increased significantly through short-term training given as part of inservice, continuing education, or formal educational programs." (Olson, p. 107) Another study involving health care personnel used pre- and posttests in demonstrating statistically significant increases in empathic listening effectiveness. (Bartnick and O'Brien, p. 667.) A study on the training of church lay helpers also concluded that "programmed training alone and in combination with didactic

methodology can have a significant impact on the enhancement of empathy." (Crabb, Moracco, and Bender, p. 221)

Why Teach Empathic Listening?

Empathy is the core of human communication, whether it be at the interpersonal, small group, public, organizational, or intercultural level. Ronald Gordon notes "the best available research indicates that empathy is at the very nucleus of interpersonal communication competence." (Gordon, p. 1) Kenneth Clark refers to empathy as a major component of human interaction and a "key social science phenomenon." (Clark, p. 188) Egan states we must extend empathy from the counseling setting and calls for the teaching of all people in empathy skills needed to live life fully and "meet its crises more effectively." (Egan, p. 20)

Contemporary research and personal experience have demonstrated the important role empathy plays in our daily lives. It is perplexing how this vital element of communication can be so central to the process of human contact and yet receive relatively little attention in communication literature and theory.

In spite of the fact that the construct of empathy can be traced to the age of Plato and Aristotle (Parella, pp. 205-6), it was not actively recognized in communication theory until the 1960's. (Arnett, p. 369) In 1970 Kelly expressed concern for the amazingly consistent lack of emphasis on the listening component of the communication process and especially empathic listening. (Kelly, p. 350) Arnett and Nakagawa noted in their 1983 search of professional speech communication journals that they found no

articles primarily focused on empathic listening. (Arnett, p. 376) Tom Bruneau echoes these observations and concerns when he points out that the concept of empathy has been given only "scant attention" in the communication literature. He states:

> "In light of its centrality and importance to almost all human communication processes, especially listening, the concept has been inadequately treated or even neglected. Despite the importance of empathy, it is common to find it not mentioned at all or to find only a sentence or paragraph on the concept in communication textbooks or theoretical discourses." (Bruneau, p. 1)

Perhaps one reason for this long-standing neglect is the belief that empathy should remain exclusively within the fields of counseling and psychology. In 1973 Ivey warned that such a perspective was shortsighted because interpersonal skills are too vital to effective communication to be limited to counseling contexts. (Ivey, pp. 311-316)

Howell states "it is inconceivable that a communication between two people could attain high quality without empathic responses of one or both participants." (Howell, p. 106) Most current listening literature now recognizes the key role of empathy in the listening process.

Empathic understanding is an essential component of human communication and listening competency. It takes us beyond mechanical, skill-oriented approaches to communication education and into the realm of shared dialogic encounter. Bruneau observes

that empathizing is basic to most nonegocentric thought and that empathic listening is what provides a connection between communication partners:

> "Without empathic listening only a depersonalized and robotic kind of understanding could transpire between speakers and listeners, characterized by rigid and repetitive denotations. The art of being fully human is the art of practicing empathic listening as much as possible in every kind of communication situation." (Bruneau, p. 16)

Any communication curriculum which is thorough must at the very least include sections, units, and/or courses related to empathic listening since it is central to the human communication process. Empathic listening is an essential part of what makes us uniquely human and, therefore, it should receive significant emphasis.

What are Some Approaches for Teaching Empathic Listening?

In order to move beyond a skills orientation to teaching listening, it is necessary to utilize an approach that combines theoretical constructs and skill development. Empathic listening can be integrated into the speech curriculum in a variety of ways through this blending of theory and practice.

In this section we will (A.) explore some theoretical foundations that should be established for any unit, section or course devoted to empathic listening; (B.) examine some implementation procedures which can be used as general guidelines,

and (C.) suggest some specific skill components and exercises for practicing empathic listening.

A. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: PRE-SKILL DEVELOPMENT PHASE

1. Framework Established:

No matter what the specific area of speech communication being taught (speech, debate, persuasion, language, small-group problem solving, nonverbal communication, etc.), the early sessions should concentrate on an exploration of the entire transactional process. A theoretical framework must be built into which all the pieces of the communication process fit--including listening. Communication variables for a specific area being taught are examined and tied to the transactional model and empathic understanding. Although specific exercises and units can be presented on empathic listening it should ideally be blended into the entire curriculum rather than just being taught separately in a few class sessions.

For example, empathy can be incorporated into the teaching of public speaking from both an audience and a speaker perspective. Would not speakers be more effective if they were encouraged to do audience analyses and audience adaptation that included empathic understanding and sensitivity of their audience members? Would not audience members be more effective comprehensive listeners if they were tuned to the speaker's feelings as well as content? In his book titled The Empathic Communicator William S. Howell emphasized the important role of empathy in the speech communication process.

He advocates verbal interaction with members of the audience as a means to developing a dialogue with them. "When audience and speaker converse in this fashion, listening becomes active, a higher level of attention is paid to the exchange, and items of the speech are better learned and retained than otherwise." (Howell, p. 225)

Empathic listening is often a vital component of problem-solving and dispute resolution. Often empathic understanding of our partner's feelings as well as views on a subject of contention can open the door to other alternatives or solutions. Empathic listening can precipitate collaboration. It is, therefore, essential to incorporate empathic listening into courses or units on conflict management, mediation, small-group problem solving, and decision making/leadership.

One theoretical framework could include some attention to the nature of dialogic communication, its underlying assumptions about human interaction, and its basic components. (Brown and Keller; Thomlison) The length of time devoted will vary depending upon the overall time available and the nature of the specific subject area being studied. No matter what framework is used, such an approach will move the teacher beyond a pure skill-oriented perspective. Arnett and Nakagawa advocate alternatives to straight skills training when they state: "Such study could explore the effects and implications of a shift of attention from the internal self to a dialogical or hermeneutical transaction `between' persons and the importance of contextual demands on our listening."

(Arnett and Nakagawa, p. 375) As with the foundation material on the transactional model of communication, the focus here is upon the development of shared meaning instead of concentrating upon the individual. This can substantially reduce the communication anxiety often experienced during skills development--the interaction becomes a joint venture instead of an individual act.

2. Establishing Rapport:

Early sessions (pre-skill development) should place a high priority on interpersonal rapport among participants. "Ice breaker" exercises can be used to help students feel comfortable and to build mutual trust. A trusting and caring atmosphere is encouraged since it facilitates the development of empathic listening skills. Exercises which provide an opportunity for the students to state their own opinions and feelings in a non-evaluative setting are helpful--no matter what the subject. Small groups can be used to encourage this type of frank, honest expression since it is less threatening than a larger group.

3. Define Empathy and Empathic Listening:

Review the definition of empathy and distinguish it from sympathy. Empathy is often described as "feeling with" while sympathy is "feeling sorry for" another. There should also be a thorough review/discussion of empathic listening to instill its basic components each time it is applied to a specific area of the communication curriculum.

One very useful definition is that offered by Wolvin and Coakley:

> "To feel and think with another, the listener must recreate the other person's world by sensing that world as if it were his or her own world; identify with the other's feelings and thoughts by entering the other's frame of reference; and replicate the other's feelings and thoughts by becoming a rational and emotional mirror." (Wolvin and Coakley, p. 254)

This definition includes the three basic components of empathic listening: (1.) relating to our partner's world of experience, (2.) recognizing feelings and content in the message, and (3.) responding with active feedback.

4. Communication and Feelings

Present and discuss basic information related to the nature of feelings this can be a separate unit on "Communication and Feelings" or blend with other material, but at the very least the following "feeling guidelines" should be discussed:

a. Feelings are not good or bad, right or wrong.
b. Feelings are present in all human communication.
c. It is the way we think that results in feelings.
d. Learn to own and trust your feelings.
e. Report feelings rather than acting out or holding in.
f. Increase your "feeling word" vocabulary.
g. Report feelings as soon as possible and appropriate.
h. Acknowledge content and feelings in messages received.

The skills section of this paper provides a discussion of many of these guidelines along with possible exercises for such a unit.

5. Select an Empathic Model:

Select an empathic listening model to present as a focal point. Wolvin and Coakley have some fine materials in their listening text which can be presented here. This author generally uses the model developed by Robert Carkhuff because of its broad applicability. Although its roots are from counseling it is basically a communication model with empathy as its foundation. (See bibliography for selected references) Become totally familiar with whatever model is selected before presentation to the students.

6. Present Model:

Present the selected model making generous use of examples to insure complete understanding. For example, Robert Carkhuff's Human Resource Development Model could be explained and illustrated. Next, Carkhuff's eight components or dimensions of effective listening would be individually presented and exercises integrated to practice each as the skills build on each other. (see skills section for ideas on how to introduce each dimension and suggested exercises.) The Carkhuff rating scale would also be explained and illustrated with examples for each dimension. The empathy dimension must be examined first since it is the foundation for the other components.

The eight skill components of the Carkhuff model are: (1.) Empathy (or Empathic Understanding), (2.) Respect, (3.) Warmth, (4.) Genuineness, (5.) Concreteness, (6.) Self-Disclosure, (7.) Confrontation, and (8.) Immediacy.

B. UTILIZE IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES:

Some of the major procedures that can be used to implement this blending of theory and skills are provided below. These general guidelines can be utilized for any subject area within the communication curriculum as empathic listening is applied.

1. Putting the Pieces Together:

Emphasis is always placed on putting the pieces back together. That is, keep the overall communication framework, process, or model in mind and refer to it so the mosaic pieces begin to fit together. Listening, like any other communication skill, must be presented as part of a whole rather than as a means in itself.

2. Forewarn About Mechanical Phase:

It is inevitable during any new skill development that there will be an early mechanical period in which some self-consciousness and/or unnaturalness will be experienced. Participants should be encouraged to discuss these feelings and it should be acknowledged as a normal phase in the learning process. It can be pointed out that before we study and practice new skills we are uninformed about he way these behaviors work and we only use them at unconscious levels. During the education process we become informed and consciously implement the new behavior skills. After the formal practice or training period we again move toward unconscious, integrated behavior but with a higher level of skill and we are now functioning from an informed position because of our knowledge base.

3. Time Balance:

Each practice session or skills exercise would be divided equally between "processing/debriefing" and the actual "skill practice." It is tempting to let the skill practice drag on too long thus leaving in ample time for the vital step of analyzing what happened, offering other possible approaches, doing ratings or other evaluation of skill level, and related processing of the practiced skills. During the processing time the skill should always be linked back to overall framework or model being used to avoid isolated skill development.

4. Progressive Skill Development:

Practice sessions should be divided into a progressive development of the component skills so there is a building effect. This can only come if the overall model of the communication process is emphasized and if the specific component skills are presented early in the theory presentation section. For example, as the skills portion of this paper will indicate, exercises progress very slowly from basic reflection of content, to blending content and feelings, to locating the source of the feeling and the feeling target, etc. This additive approach is reinforced each practice session by always beginning with the basics already covered and then adding a new component, skill, or technique to the process.

5. Theme Awareness: The Golden "Thread":

No matter what the communication context (small group discussion, public speaking, debate, interpersonal communication,

and so forth) the listeners are encouraged to discover "threads" in the content and feeling levels of the speaker's communication so all the seemingly divergent statements start to reveal a pattern. This recognizes the tendency of most people to use a type of "stream of consciousness" technique when they talk. This approach can be used in formally prepared speeches also to encourage listener sensitivity to the speaker's ideas and emotions.

6. Use of Videotape:

A little creative thought will produce a multitude of ways in which videotape can be utilized in teaching empathic listening. A few obvious approaches are:

(a) use it for volunteer dyads to be played back during the processing sessions; nonverbal communication can be reviewed and even still framed as these discussions explore appropriate empathic responses;

(b) prerecord some scenes using acting students, you, or friends talking about something which concerns or interests them; ask the group to call out the emotions they are picking up ;

(c) examples of effective or ineffective empathic listening responses can be demonstrated by presenting portions of videotaped television programs or scripted segments to demonstrate specific skills;

(d) various tapes on communication can be used to present theoretical constructs and demonstrate skills related to empathic listening (for example,

the videotape entitled "Drug Free Kids" can be used to demonstrate many basic empathic listening skills).

7. Encourage Applications:

The teacher should encourage discussion of both successful and unsuccessful examples of where the empathic listening skills have been used. This will increase applications and self-confidence in using the skills in everyday situations.

8. Emphasize the Overall Communication Transaction:

It is vitally important to consistently focus on the overall communication process instead of falling into the trap of over emphasis on individual skills. By centering on the entire transaction and the blending of theory with skill practice the potential dangers of skills training can be short circuited. Focusing on caring and the dialogic process appear to keep the learners aware of the process nature of communication and empathic listening.

C. SKILL DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES/METHODOLOGIES/EXERCISES:

This section will provide some suggestions for possible approaches, methods, and exercises for teaching empathic listening.

1. An Approach Using the Carkhuff Components:

Once you are thoroughly familiar with the Carkhuff model the following procedures can be used to begin the skill development phase.

(a) Utilize dyads or triads for early practice sessions and gradually increase the small group size as participants become more comfortable.

(b) Each Carkhuff dimension or component for empathic listening is illustrated through specific exercises using volunteers who hold conversations. Usually, two participants volunteer to discuss with one designated to practice a specific listening skill component. Following the short conversation the procedure below is used to "process" the interaction:

(1) general discussion of the transaction;

(2) each observer provides their rating on the Carkhuff scale for the component being practiced with rationale;

(3) the listener gives a self rating with rationale;

(4) The speaker gives their rating for the listener; it should be noted often that this is the most significant rating since how the speaker feels is ultimately the most important aspect of the communication process.

(c) After each new dimension is demonstrated and processed by the entire group, small groups (which increase in number as the unit progresses beginning with dyads) are used to continue the practice sessions. Sometimes the instructor will spend the entire small

group time in one group and at other times will wander from group to group making observations.

(d) Each "round" of component skill practice is followed up with the total group discussing applications, difficulties, insights. The instructor should tie the component to the overall listening and communication process.

2. A "Communication and Feelings" Approach:

Another approach to utilize in the teaching of empathic listening is to begin a general unit on "Communication and Feelings." There are many ways to develop this theme so that students/trainees become aware of the role of emotions in the communication process as a whole. Here are some suggestions to stimulate your creative thinking on designing a unit for the purpose of teaching empathic listening.

(a) Getting In-Touch: Before a person can truly empathize with another person they must become aware of their own emotional framework since it will provide insights about their partner's emotional world. Exercises which encourage students to acknowledge their own present feelings and verbally label them as specifically as possible is a productive starting point. This can be done through small group discussions on current controversial topics where they are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about the selected issue.

(b) Develop exercises which push them to locate the "feeling

source." That is, the person or event which triggered their present feelings. One exercise for this purpose would be to discuss a popular movie and ask participants to tell what events in the film generated the feelings they had about the movie. Another approach is to have small group exercises in which students talk about something that they especially like or dislike--this will lead to several emotions being directly and indirectly expressed. The other members of the group are instructed to ask what caused the feelings of others so that all become more aware of feeling sources. The instructor can point out that once we know the feeling source we are in a better position to deal with them and even develop solutions to interpersonal problems in many cases. The instructor will also want to give some examples of his or her feeling sources and will remind the group that we generally do not have just one feeling at a time. Levels of feelings and feelings about feelings should be discussed to give the class a better understanding of how feelings work.

(c) During these exercises the instructor should attempt to make several important points about feelings so the students are more aware of their own emotional reactions. A few sample questions might be:

(1) What did it feel like to be experiencing that emotion?

(2) What nonverbal clues did you give that you were feeling that way?

(3) Were you able to precisely label the feeling? (That is, was your "feeling word" vocabulary sufficient?)

(d) Be sure to provide the students with some basic guidelines about the nature of emotions. I call these "feeling guidelines." For example:

(1) EMOTIONS SERVE AS A MONITORING SYSTEM. When we feel comfortable, relaxed, happy, involved, playful, affectionate, etc., our monitoring system tells us we feel safe, we feel comfortable being ourselves, we trust our partner, we feel free to change our point of view on an issue, and so on. When we feel fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, sadness, suspicion, etc., our monitoring system tells us that something needs to be clarified or understood, that we need more information, that other alternatives need to be examined, and so on. Thus, emotional awareness of self and others is a valuable system which supplies us with important intrapersonal and interpersonal information.

(2) LOCATING THE FEELING SOURCE can help us determine whether the feeling target is ourself, someone else, something else, and whether or not we want to initiate some action because of that emotion. Exercises can be used to demonstrate this point by

asking students during their discussions to clarify the feeling target. ("You seem angry with your father"; "So you are proud of yourself for improving that math grade.") Often just locating the target of the fear, anger, etc. can provide potential solutions to deal with the difficulty constructively.

(3) FEELINGS ARE NOT GOOD OR BAD--THEY JUST ARE. Our Feelings have physiological, cognitive, verbal, and nonverbal manifestations. When we feel angry our bodies may have an increase in blood pressure, heart rate, secretion of adrenaline, and so forth. These reactions can be used by us to cognitively label what we are feeling. Feelings are therefore internal reactions and they are factual for the person experiencing them. They do exist. As such they are neither good or bad--they just are. This can lead to a discussion of about the ways we act on our feelings.

(4) FEELINGS ARE PRESENT IN ALL TRANSACTIONS--WORK ON LISTENING FOR THEM. Emotions are an inevitable part of our existence as human beings and communicators. It is part of our innate nature to "feel." They cannot be turned on and off like a light switch. They are always present in an interpersonal transaction. A simple exercise to help demonstrate this is to divide the class into dyads. Then ask

them to designate a "listener" and a "speaker." The speaker talks about absolutely anything they want to talk about while the listener is asked to simply listen for what the speaker is presently feeling as they talk. When the speaker is finished, the listener simply says "You feel _____." (filling in a present tense feeling the listener is picking up from the speaker) This exercise can lead to a discussion of the layers of feelings, feelings about other feelings ("I feel guilty that I am angry"), and multiple emotions.

(5) RECOGNIZE IT IS THE WAY WE THINK THAT RESULTS IN FEELINGS. Albert Ellis states in his theory of rational-emotive therapy that it is what we are thinking which causes us to have a particular emotion instead of a different one. (Ellis) First, an activating stimulus is present. This could be some behavior performed by our communication partner, an event, a situation, a behavior of our own, and so on. Second, we have a belief about this stimulus which may be rational or irrational. Third, we will have some emotional reaction based on how we are thinking about the stimulus. Instead of placing blame on the stimulus, we need to recognize that how we think about the stimulus determines our emotional reactions. Many exercises can be devised to

illustrate this concept. For example, ask students to tell about something that made them happy or sad or angry, etc. Ask them to isolate the assumptions they were operating under regarding the situation. These may include "should statements" such as: "He should have known better than to do that," or "I should have tried another way," or "They should have been more considerate of my feelings." The situation ly be diagramed on the board to illustrate the three parts of the Ellis model. By replacing the second stage with several different assumptions which are written on the board it is easy to show how the resulting emotion could have been different depending on which set of assumptions are made. Also, lists of common irrational assumptions can be easily generated by groups or the class as a whole.

(6) OWN AND TRUST YOUR FEELINGS. Here you can discuss the difference between "I messages" and "You messages". ("I am angry" vs "You made me angry") This can lead to discussions about taking personal responsibility for our feelings and it works well with the material on recognizing that it is how we think that determines how we feel.

(7) REPORT FEELINGS RATHER THAN ACTING THEM OUT OR HOLDING THEM IN. This can be tied to materials on feedback if so desired. Role plays can be used to

demonstrate the same scene handled by (a) acting out feelings and (b) constructively reporting feelings. It is important to remind the students that "I feel" messages are more accurate than blame messages which attribute the generation of your feelings to others. The class can discuss when they have tried to deny feelings. The physical and emotional results can be pin pointed in most cases. For example, ulcers, headaches, depression, etc. It should also be emphasized that in most cases it is advisable to report feeling as close as possible to the time they were felt. Students can be instructed to observe how often people report past feeling as opposed to present feelings.

(8) WE NEED TO INCREASE OUR "FEELING WORD" VOCABULARY. The larger our vocabulary for emotions, the more specific we can be in recognizing and labeling the emotions of self and others. The average person has a very limited vocabulary for specific emotions because the majority of feelings are expressed nonverbally. Saying we feel "good" is far from precise in most cases. It may be adequate in phatic communion (small talk) but not in empathic communication. Students can be required to develop their own list of feelings or a list can be provided for their study. Many exercises are possible for

this feeling guideline. One approach is to read dialogue from a play or to role play little scenes and ask the class to quickly identify the specific emotion--let the students call out their choice of feeling words. Another exercise involves dyads closing their eyes and holding hands. The instructor names different emotions one at a time and the dyads attempt to silently portray the feelings named through their "hand dialogue" with their partner. A videotape of a soap opera can create a lively exercise built around calling out emotions as they are presented in the dramatization; a variation is to turn off the sound, call out the perceived emotions, then replay the same scene with sound to see if additional or different emotions are located. This can lead to a discussion on the importance of nonverbal cues in empathic listening.

(9) ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONTENT AND FEELINGS OF YOUR PARTNER. Since feelings are always present in us as well as our interpersonal partner, an empathic listener listens at two levels: (1) content and (2) feelings. Paraphrasing exercises can be used to give students practice in the combining of content and feelings. For example, students can be placed in groups of three. Conversations can be held on selected topics or on topics chosen by the students. During the

conversations each participant must paraphrase the content of the speaker to the speaker's satisfaction. In the second round, they must reflect both content and a present tense feeling. In the third round, they reflect content, a present feeling, and its target. ("You're feeling disappointed with yourself because you didn't study much.") This can be followed by a forth round in which an action or desired action is added. ("You feel angry with Joe because he let you down and you want to tell him about your feelings but not lose his friendship.") One written exercise which can bring a greater awareness of empathic listening is called a verbatim. The student selects a conversation in which they recently participated. The dialogue is written down as accurately as possible, almost as if it were a play script. Next, the student assesses the dialogue in light of the above "feeling guidelines" plus any other requested items such as rating the level of empathic listening. (Thomlison)

Remember, exercises should progress very slowly from basic reflection of content ("You want to delay the meeting till Friday."), to refection of feelings ("You feel frustrated."), to blending of content and feelings ("You're frustrated because...."), to locating the feeling source and feeling target ("You

feel angry with yourself because you failed the exam." or "You are proud of him because....").

Personalizing content and feelings is practiced constantly during the sessions. Sessions can be videotaped and replayed to illustrate where empathic listening was accurate and inaccurate. Also remember that the ultimate determiner of effective empathic response is the feedback from the speaker other than what the instructor or anyone else thinks should have been the appropriate response. There is no substitute for consistent practice and application of empathic listening which means it should be given a fairly large section of a course or scattered throughout the course whenever possible. (Thomlison)

3. Other Approaches and Exercises:

Peavy:

Vance Peavy developed an entire program for counselor trainees which includes an extensive section on empathic listening. Much of this material has applicability to teaching listening in general and empathic listening in particular. He presents what he terms "the listening ladder" and provides exercises for each rung beginning at the top and working down the ladder to the seventh rung. The second rung is labeled "Bracketing Ego Impulses." This theme of non-egocentric focus appears repeatedly in the empathy literature. One of Peavy's exercises is called "circle sentences" can be adapted as follows for use in teaching empathic listening:

(1) A group of five to seven members are asked to think about the beginning of a fictional episode which could possibly be developed into a story. Only three or four sentences are needed. The leader selects a person to start the story. For example:

> "On Tuesday when I was driving to work, I stopped at a stop sign on Young Street, waiting for some children to pass in front of my car. As I looked out of the car, I saw some motion in the window of a house. From afar, behind a partly drawn curtain, I saw a person's arm moving in what seemed to me to be a frantic or desperate gesture for me to come to the house." (Peavy, p. 89)

(2) As soon as the first person finishes their part the person next to them continues the story for one or two sentences, and so on. (A variation is to let the person talking tap the shoulder of anyone in the circle rather than going in order around the circle. A second variation is to require each new speaker to include a feeling in their first sentence which relates to what the person who has just finished speaking was probably feeling. For example: "I was so shocked by the events that I could not move. When I finally regained my wits I drove into the driveway of the house and went to the door.") The goal is to build the story by quickly moving from one speaker to the next.

(3) Once the story is completed a recording of it should be immediately played. Discussions can be held on the transition sentences, the feeling word vocabulary demonstrated, the use of vocal inflections to convey emotions, gestures and facial expressions read by one speaker to locate the feelings for his or her first sentence, etc. The exercise reinforces effective comprehensive and empathic listening. It also encourages listening for the "golden thread" of the story.

Miller and Coady:

Pamela Miller and William Coady have developed a program for teaching "vocational ethics." They see empathic listening as a mediation skill. Some exercises are provided which can be adapted to teaching empathic listening. They cite six basic empathic listening competencies or skills which could serve as a model for a unit on this topic. Exercises could be built around each skill. The six are as follows:

(1) The ability to give verbal feedback that demonstrates an understanding of the emotional and intellectual content of others' communications.

(2) The ability to recognize messages conveyed through facial expressions and body language.

(3) The ability to recognize when conflicting messages are conveyed through verbal and body language.

(4) The ability to respond to others with compatible verbal and body language in such a way as to promote

interpersonal understanding.

(5) The ability to identify with the personal experiences expressed by others.

(6) The ability to make statements that identify the feelings and attitudes being expressed directly or indirectly by others. (Miller and Coady, p. 15)

Pinderhughes:

Elaine Pinderhughes has applied the teaching of empathic listening to counselors and social workers involved in cross-cultural interactions. She provides approaches for exploring feelings about ethnicity, power, race, and cultural values (Pinderhughes, 1984). She also examines ways of developing a deeper understanding of another's feelings and "power differential" based on cultural differences. (Pinderhughes, 1979)

CONCLUSION

This paper was designed to provide a rationale and some practical approaches to teaching empathic listening. A skills-oriented focus alone is not sufficient to develop effective empathic listening; there must be a theoretical framework for the skill development to have lasting influence.

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